

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 7, 2005

The Honorable J. Dennis Hastert  
H 232 - Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Speaker:

We the undersigned are writing to denounce the woefully insufficient funding provided for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) under President Bush's FY 06 budget. We hope that you will oppose these egregious funding cuts and help reverse this irresponsible budget plan.

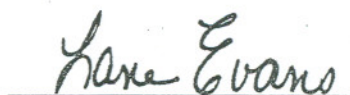
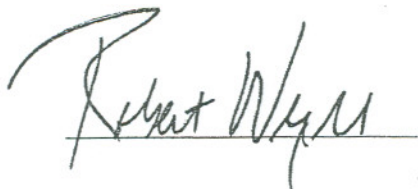
Not only is President Bush's budget proposal insufficient to meet the growing demands being placed on the VA, but the President's budget proposes a \$250 enrollment fee for so called "higher-income" veterans who have no service-connected disability, as well as doubling their co-payments for prescription drugs. Incredibly, in the same budget, President Bush proposes an 8 percent increase in federal spending, including a 4 percent increase in overall defense spending. Cutting needed veterans health benefits is an insult to the brave men and women we are calling upon to defend the country. In essence, President Bush is sending the message that America will not stand by those who have so honorably served our nation in our time of need.

Last Congress, the Department of Veterans Affairs testified before the House VA Committee that the VA budget required a 14 percent funding increase in order to keep the same level of services available for America's veterans. Yet, the President's budget for FY 06 funds veterans' medical programs at \$28.2 billion, which is only \$102 million more than FY 05 or equal to less than one percent increase. Even Congressional Budget Office estimates show that, excluding the legislative proposals to increase fees on veterans by \$424 million, the President's budget for veterans program falls \$762 million below the amount needed to maintain purchasing power at the 2005 level.

Further, the President's budget gives the VA the green light to eliminate 2 percent of its direct medical care employees (more than 3,000 full-time employees) and reduce the staff at the Board of Veterans Appeals. This will result in longer waiting times for appellate decisions, as well as an increase in the backlog of appeals, which numbered 151,031 on February 5, 2005. America's veterans deserve better, and it is critical that Congress honor its obligations to provide quality health care and benefits to those who have sacrificed greatly for our nation. Democrats on the House Veterans Affairs Committee have concluded that a \$3 billion increase is needed for veterans medical care in order to meet the growing demands of services and keep pace with medical inflation.

It is our sincere hope that you will not support the President's misguided budget request but, instead, will work with us to provide a \$3 billion increase in funding for veterans medical care, so that we can honor our obligation to the nation's servicemembers, veterans and military families.

Sincerely,





Tom

Jim V. Stuenkel

Carole B. Hooley

Tom Lando

Ed Factor

Sam Morris

John M. Smith

Julia Case

Tom Case

John Sanderling

St. B. Ryan  
Hana Ashtle

Henry Williams

John D. Lee

Deirdre Rader

John D. Lee

Ray Fink

John S. Repolitus

Ben Chandler

Bob B.

RMG

Alena Sanderling

Henry Linder

Tom W.